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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the impact of limiting one's theoretical views of early childhood to deficit-based models on research designs in two areas: instrumental music-making and talking on telephones. Both research projects are described as involving populations of children in nursery school classes attached to primary schools. Both involved observation of children in independent, self-initiated activity (play with the telephone or musical instruments) and participation with the children on a one-to-one basis. Relevant equipment was placed in the nursery environment, and children were observed by regular visitors to the room. Key to the research methods and procedures used is the idea that researchers' attempts to ensure impartiality are likely to be more artificial and inhibiting to young children than they are to ensure participation. If children are allowed to initiate the research activity at its inception and retain a share of the initiative during the course of the researcher-subject exchange, children gain freedom to control its direction. When adults are responsive to children in the research process, children become more confident and demonstrate capabilities which might be masked by other research strategies. The paper contends that sharing the initiative and maintaining sensitivity in turn-taking practices is especially important to the emergence of partial understandings. Excerpts from a key passage of data from child-researcher interaction for each field of investigation are discussed to illustrate main points. (Contains 35 references.) (KB)

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Sharing the initiative with 3-4 year old children in two areas of educational research (instrumental music-making and telephone discourse): exploring challenges and rewards.

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Abstract

The authors of this paper have conducted research studies with 3-4 year old children in apparently different areas: instrumental music-making and talking on telephones. Both have aimed to collect spontaneous actions and include observations and participation in their research design.

The paper begins with a brief exploration in the two research fields of the damaging effects on research design of limiting one's theoretical viewpoint of early childhood to deficit-based models. Highlighting young children as in a 'being' not 'becoming state' (Morrow and Richards, 1996) in each area of research has led to a focus on children's multi-modal activity and entwined affective/cognitive thought processes. These appear to be appropriately approached with researcher-child interaction in which adult power over the context is not minimised and not unchecked. Especially important to the emergence of (partial) understandings is sharing the initiative and maintaining sensitivity in turn-taking practices.

Excerpts from a key passage of data from child-researcher interaction for each field of investigation will be presented and discussed.

Introduction

We have both recently completed research studies with three- and four-year-old children in apparently different fields. One of us (SY) studied spontaneous instrumental music-making and the other (JG) telephone talk. There are 'first level' features common to both projects. We both took as our samples, the populations of children in nursery classes attached to maintained primary schools. We both, at first, observed the children in independent, self-initiated activity, playing with the telephone or musical instruments, and then developed our research by participating with children on a one-to-one basis. We both imported equipment into nursery environments (telephones and xylophones) to stimulate pockets of activity of the kind we were interested in. Within the usual patterns of circulation and self-initiated play common to nursery practice, the children were free to chose our focus activities and were in no way coerced into participating. Neither of us were permanent members of staff in the nurseries where we carried out our research but visited, regularly, over a period of time.

Beyond these surface commonalities, a process of comparing our two studies revealed, at a deeper level, shared aspects of our approach to research with young children which had resulted in some similarities in procedures and techniques. The following paper presents these similarities which we have distilled from common experience into a set of issues and themes.

Adopting an 'asset' view

Neither of our respective areas of interest, young children's encounters with the technologies of telephones and musical instruments, have been extensively studied (Young, 2000; Gillen, forthcoming). Prior research has mostly taken an explicitly developmental approach in which young children's telephone talk or music-making has been analysed against predetermined indices and the findings further plotted on progressive trajectories. One feature of this approach is the evaluation of children's competencies against yardsticks taken from assumed endpoints in adult activity. Consequently, the purpose of research becomes one of identifying embryonic first stages according to largely pre-determined general models of what it is to make music or to talk on the telephone. The assumed prioritising of a search for linear progression tends to result in the earliest years being glossed over, both in research and in

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educational approaches, in a haste to move on to the more 'mature' activity of older children. The deficit view of young children's behaviour built into such approaches is recognised (e.g. Athey, 1990).

In a similar vein of thinking, Morrow and Richards (1996) have called for young children to be considered as in a 'being' not 'becoming' state (p.92); that is, to take children seriously as they experience their lives in the present and to focus less on where children are moving on to. Thus, by choosing to focus our research on one age phase and studying in micro-detail collected instances of musicking or talking, we sought to avoid what we had identified as the shortcomings of research predicated on models of progression. Our initial research decisions were prompted by the hope to create circumstances in which children would reveal to us competences hitherto obscured. Adopting an 'asset' view therefore holds the expectation that we would find children to be differently competent, but (from Morrow & Richard, 1996, p.98) in no way lesser or inferior. 'Seeing children' (James & Prout, 1997) in this way is to adopt a respectful stance, which accorded with our hopes and aims in research (*cf.* Eder & Corsaro , 1999).

Examples of participation

To provide a basis for our propositions, we will describe aspects of the early moments in the child-adult participatory phases of the research. The first phases of our respective studies had involved observation of children playing spontaneously with our imported equipment and it was in later stages that we moved into more direct participatory approaches as a research technique. From the outset we were both attempting to engage with children in ways which did not dominate through the exercise our own power, and to work with some notion of allowing the child to share the initiative (*cf.* Corsaro & Eder, 2000). This was driven in the early stages, in part, by intuitive convictions that such approaches would be more revealing of the processes of children's telephone conversations or music-making than traditional experimental methods had been. In applied, inflexible methodologies the child's mode of engagement is constrained and curtailed by the design of the task. These convictions were also supported by the findings of research into infant-caregiver interaction which

has demonstrated that adults adopt a relationship of empathetic responsiveness in interactions with infants and young children (e.g. Stern, 1985).

Adult-child relationship

However, it is not a simple advocacy of participatory research methods in contrast to applied procedures which we present here but a more in depth look at the processes of engaging with children for research purposes. A strategy of attempting to 'share the initiative' with children asks important questions of the nature of the relationship between adult researcher and child. It is axiomatic to the research process that researchers establish some form of relationship with children in order to gain access and insight into processes which this form of engagement with adults reveals. However, we would argue that in our work we have constructed this relationship rather differently than is the norm in research with young children. We did not seek to minimise the adult presence by effacing it (as far as this is ever possible), as some researchers have attempted to do (e.g. King[1], 1980; Sawyer[2], 1996). However carefully the research procedures are designed to negate any effect of the adult presence, this can never be achieved. The bodily presence (or even surrogate presence in the form of technologies for collecting data) of the researcher will in some way impinge upon the children's responses. Nor did we seek to equalise the adult presence by attempting to become quasi-children, as a few researchers have done (e.g. Mandell, 1988). Children know that adults are adults, and not children, and expect certain forms of behaviour from them. Faced with atypical behaviour from an adult, the child is likely to be bemused and baffled. In our view, what adults have assumed to be research relationships of neutrality, objectivity or equality may be having adverse and negative effects on young children who are primed to expect kinds of response and involvement from adults and are disturbed by their absence.

Children have made relationships with adults since the moment of birth (Trevarthen, Kokkinaki & Fiamenghi, 1999). To do so in certain, specific ways is fundamental to early childhood behaviour and young children are expert at this. Adults who make

[1] King's description of his observational study of an infant classroom gives details of how he declined overtures by the children by maintaining his full adult (male) height, by refusing to return their eye contact and responding to verbal interactions minimally and in ways designed to close down the exchange rather than continue it.

[2] Sawyer even declined to respond to children's verbal overtures in order to arrive at a situation where the children ceased to attempt any contact with him.

themselves available, are harnessed by infants and young children to provide what they currently need, physically, emotionally and cognitively. Familiar adults are incorporated into children's negotiations and investigations with the world. Throughout early childhood, most adults attune easily and intuitively to children's needs and present themselves in ways which are conducive to establishing forms of interaction anticipated by young children. To thwart these affirming and expected patterns of child-with-adult engagement, as researchers do by attempting to remain impartial, by attempting to be 'as if' children or by dominating the encounter, is, we suggest, confusing and off-putting to young children. They do not yet have the experience to cope and be adaptive to a range of relational styles with adults. Therefore, the interpersonal features of young children's encounters with adults, if they fall outside the familiar and anticipated, will impinge detrimentally on children's responses. In our view, unless sensitivity to the child's contributions, attempts to achieve mutuality and allowing room for negotiation, is introduced in research with young children, the adult-with-child relationship may be one responsible for distorting the child's ways of participating, even repressing them.

In these patterns of relationships with adults, which are essential in early childhood, the distribution of power between adult and child, and how power is exercised, is crucial to the notion of shared initiative which we propose (Gillen & Young, 2000). The adult is more powerful by virtue of being the adult, physically and in terms of experience, and can in many ways, intentionally or inadvertently, disempower the child. From both our research fields we find that constructions of early childhood as 'developmental' or as 'natural' (James & Prout, 1997) have tended to encourage approaches to research in which the child is 'subjected'. Driving these approaches is the assumption that processes giving clues to the behaviours which are the focus of the research are internal to the child. As such, they would be sullied by any form of adult intervention. In contrast, hand-in-hand with the approach we describe, is a perspective which sees that what children do is inevitably an interplay between their own competences and an adult constructed world (e.g. Chaiklin & Lave, 1993; Graue & Walsh, 1998). The focus on inner processes is replaced by an exploration of networks of relationships between adult and child mediated by the equipment we imported. Thus, we did not seek to eliminate the usual patterns of reactivity between adult and child, but recognised them

to be integral and to provide a raft for the child's evolving musical or verbal interactions with us.

Imitation and repetition

Turning to procedural detail of our approaches, we set up our imported equipment as one of a range of free choice activities in the nurseries where we carried out our research. Thus, children were free to self-select play with the telephone or xylophone. On the basis of that first, spontaneous act we responded with a copy, or as near copy as was possible. For JG this usually took the form of waiting for the child to initiate a greeting and then responding appropriately. Since telephone openings typically take the form of adjacency pairs (Schegloff, 1968), this returns the initiative to the child, so long as the adult represses, as it were, the strong tendency to jump in shortly after (Veach, 1981; Holmes, 1981). In the xylophone play, having identified that children usually needed a short period of orientation, to settle in position, grip the beaters, dabble on the xylophone, SY waited for what appeared to be the right moment to respond.[3] Simple though our reactive strategies sound, in practice they were difficult to achieve. The adult-child interaction patterns in our society common to educative situations, to which we are conditioned, had to be overcome. Particularly among middle-class, white, educated adults interactions consistent with 'good parenting' or 'good teaching' are usually conceived as an opportunity to grasp what the child has contributed and build on it, perhaps over zealously (Woodhead, 1998). Allowing, sometimes, for nothing to happen, to leave time lapses and silence, or allowing for overmuch to happen, a flurry of words, a welter of instrumental sounds, and either not intervene or judge when and how to respond, proved a challenge. Both of us recall feeling our way. The early stages of research inevitably started somewhat clumsily as roles were open and discovered.

In comparing our two media, responding to the child by means of the repetition of a musical idea is unsurprising, in that repetition is a structural simple in music and a successful improvisational strategy (e.g. Sawyer, 1999). At first glance, it appears less likely to exist in dialogue between an adult and child of this age. Repetition of the child's own utterances back to them is a feature of the register of talk addressed to

[3] This kind of strategy is also adopted by music therapists.

much young children by caregivers (in some societies) (Kaye, 1982). Yet formulaic language is a strong feature of the language of all of us, if by 'formulaic language' we include simple lexical collocations, then it has been estimated that as much as 70% of adult native language may be formulaic (Altenberg, 1990). The emphasis on 'scaffolding' language in our culture - whereby adults work creatively to expand upon children's utterances - may possibly serve to conceal the extent to which the practice of routines is highly significant in language acquisition (Gillen, 1997).

For both of us the protocols which evolved from our work demanded that we not initiate new ideas or topics. Matching our content to the child's was crucial to the strategy. By doing this we affirm the child's contributions and invite a further response. It also forced a focus on what the child was doing, in the moment. Certainly in music-making, the need to listen carefully to how the child played and make as accurate a replica as possible was a useful discipline and research strategy. The adult has to attempt not to filter, and to suspend having in mind too many unbending anticipations for where the improvisation of words or sounds is heading. The discipline was to focus on the immediate present, attempting to allow the child to control the forward direction. Inevitably, however, to some extent, we did hear the children's responses through a filter of conventional usage, both musical and conversational which, in turn, refracted our imitative replies.

Children's versions

In reflecting on our discussions, I recall that both of us have poked fun at our own attempts to contribute musically and verbally in exchanges with children, as if to diffuse some unease at finding adaptive ways of working with children in 'child-centred' ways of talking or making music. Being comfortable with child-centred as not 'childish' and accommodating this within our identities as 'serious' researchers may underlie the tensions we experienced.

However, this discomfort in the research process may also point to something crucial about our approach. As a result of allowing the children to initiate the exchanges and attempting to respond reactively, we problematised our own, acquired versions of music and telephone discourse rather than the children's versions (also, Davis, 1998). We

would both argue (and have assembled evidence to demonstrate (Gillen, 1998; Young, 2000) that prior studies have approached young children's activity in our respective fields with sets of unchallenged assumptions about the nature of the activity still in place. Either the adult version is assumed as norm and, as a result, the comparative deficiencies of the child's version stand out in relief, or the child's version is isolated in a world of its own, essential, idealised maybe, but subtly regarded as a deviance because it lies outside the standardised version. Both viewpoints, therefore, leave the adult version intact and unchallenged. Our own, acquired 'mature' versions were often inadequate to the task of interacting with children. A musical identity, for example, derived from a conventional training in Western art music had to be modified and reconsidered (Young, 1995). By allowing this problematising to be reflected back as our responsibility, we were able to learn new things about the children's participation.[4] The responses of the child are allowed to challenge the style of adult participation, and, in turn, to question the research agenda. In other words, any mismatch between our own musical or language behaviour and the child's was not regarded as indicative of deficiency on the part of the child, it was regarded as a reason for us to adjust our own behaviour in order to accommodate, reveal and gain access to the child's different ways of making music or conducting telephone conversations. Exploring our own adjustments informed our understanding of the child's behaviour (and, in turn, caused more self-questioning of our research procedures). Again, with some similarity to therapeutic techniques, adults' responsiveness becomes a foil for the child to confidently shape their own identity through musical activity or talk (Gillen, 1999) and thus demonstrate capabilities which might be masked by other research strategies. The power we have as adults, by virtue of having more and varied experience, is used constructively to control and adapt our responses to be contingent upon the child's.

The enabling relationships we think we made with children provided 'framing' contexts (Fogel, 1993) which encourage children to release their capacities for musical and verbal interaction. This is not quite the same as the concept of 'scaffolding' which implies an external framework structured around a task which is known to the adult but not the child (Stone, 1998). We did not know what the task would be nor how it was

[4] Counsellors and therapists recognise that the emotional responses and discomforts they experience when working with clients may give them important clues about the client's state of

yet to unfurl. We attempted to provide opportunities for children to engage in an interactive process, structured around certain principles of adult-child interaction, which the child coloured in as they wished. The process allows for children then to impose their own directions, restraints and controls. The imposition of constraints extended also to the adult contributions, which were bounded and often, we discovered, controlled and manipulated by the child. Analysis of the composite data which we carried out away from the field revealed the children's systems of contingency and constraint, of which we had often been unaware until revealed by analysis. From these procedures, discoveries could be made about the processes children employ in co-constructing telephone conversations and making music. Of particular importance, because the child had control over the interaction, we could be more confident that we were gaining insight into what was salient, what had priority and significance to the children.

Timing

Timing provides a particularly interesting example to illustrate more specifically what we are proposing. By participating with children and studying the process of telephone discourse and music-making, we had data which was time-based and evolved through time. The unfolding process was sustained through turn-taking processes, always turn-taking on the telephone and often turn-taking in the music-making. Sharing the initiative with children was crucially dependent on being responsive to the timing strategies which children brought to the encounter. This in turn could teach us more about the children's processes and competences. This is most revealing in telephone discourse and a description of this will be informative to music-making. In the usual adult-to-adult telephone conversation, turns follow a certain conventional timing pattern which is recognised and conformed to by both participants. Young children need longer gaps than is usual in adult-to-adult telephone conversations (Veach, 1981). As a consequence, the adult may unwittingly interpolate at a moment which is uncomfortably early for the child. Instead of interpreting this is a weakness in children's ability to sustain telephone conversations, JG recognised her own need to learn how to adjust her timing patterns in talking with children. Once the adjustment had been

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mind.

made, aspects of children's competences in sustaining telephone discourse which had hitherto been obscured were revealed by this strategy.

In music-making, the time lapses between adult and child turns appeared to be 'natural' in so far as SY, as adult, did not need to consciously adjust timing patterns. In music-making, a focus on timing opens up a different issue. Research into young children's music-making as an independent, asocial activity, has tended to reveal a lack of competences for timing in music (Young, 1999[a]). Children have been characterised as playing sporadically and randomly in a way which lacks predetermined and searched-for structures of musical regularity such as 'steady beat', metric organisation and phrasing. Within music-making as a dialogic activity, communicative and interpersonal, children revealed competences for timing (Young, 1999[b]). They were able to coordinate their playing to be in time with another, to phrase their music consistently and to anticipate the direction of musical exchanges with another. These capacities were stimulated by involving them in creating musically communicative structures (Trevarthen, 2000). Given what is now understood of interaction patterns between infant and caregivers and the fundamental importance of timing to the making of successful relationships (e.g. Kaye, 1982; Stern, 1985), it is little surprising that interactional timings should impinge so importantly on shared initiative approaches to young children. It is possible to offer the practical suggestion that one strategy of participatory research techniques with young children should be to allow the children time to settle. In this way, researchers can learn the timing patterns generated by children's interactions within both social and material contexts. Enabling children to share the initiative may depend on participatory adults adjusting their reactive timing.

Considerations

It would be misleading to suggest that we always interacted sensitively so that all our 'conversations' with children were successfully adjusted and contingent upon the child's contributions. But when the child was offered the chance to take the initiative and maintain, at least some measure of control of their side of the exchange, they would do so willingly and easily in most cases. Interestingly, adult responses which did not fit with their current priorities were often ignored or subverted. By plotting carefully the interplay of responses in a microanalysis of music-making, SY discovered that, in some

exchanges, a surprising proportion of adult contributions had been completely ignored by the children.

The approaches we describe are susceptible to criticism that too much is projected onto the children's responses and the interpretations are biased by the researchers involvement as participant. But we argue that all data is made in the relationship between child and adult, whatever the nature of the relationship. Key is the idea we emphasise that, with young children, attempts to ensure impartiality are likely to be more artificial and inhibiting to them than connection and participation. By initiating the activity at its inception and retaining a share of the initiative during the course of the exchange, the children gained certain freedoms to control its direction. By ignoring adult contributions which were not useful at that moment and by giving body language or verbal language signals, the children actively determined the nature and extent of the influence of the participatory adult. In working with young children, their relative inexperience at managing relationships with adults means that the researcher must accept, and work within, the role offered to them and created for them by the children.

In spite of the challenges inherent in our approach, in our view there are potentially many rewards in developing and extending participatory research strategies with young children in which adults attempt to share the initiative. We take a comment from Trevarthen et al (1999), to encapsulate for us a fundamental premise by way of conclusion.

> "However it is cultivated, institutionalised and managed, education of culture is conversational, inter-subjective process in which the learners make active contribution.'

It is as a such a process that we sought to understand children as conversationalists and music-makers.

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